

PERSONAL ENHANCEMENT

37

- 304 and has no ceremonial significance. It is made by inflicting innumerable punctures with a thorn over a pattern made on the skin with charcoal.

Personal Hygiene

- 515 The Orokaiva is as dirty as and no dirtier than the next native. He hates the feel of cold water unless he is already hot and perspiring, and he would rather take a bath to get cool than to get clean. After his bathe he anoints his body and hair with the oily milk of the coco-nut, which he uses at all times with freedom. The somewhat rancid smell which one notices at times may be rather the effect of this oil than a genuine body odour.

- [832] The native uses a variety of perfumes which are not always alluring, and are sometimes even repulsive to the senses of a European. He wears sprigs of scented leaf in his armlet which he thinks will increase his sexual attraction. It is interesting to note that the delightful aroma of the lime tree (an introduction found in every village) has actually been declared unpleasant by some informants.

Face Painting

- 302 Faces are painted as a rule on gala occasions alone, but a young man who is intent on the self-display which constitutes the earlier stage of native love-making may on his own initiative wear a forehead ornament and decorate his cheeks. Nowadays he uses a trade mirror; formerly he poured water into a wooden bowl (*teva*) or one of those stone mortars which are still to be found in the Northern Division, and for which this use, viz. that of a mirror, is the only explanation a native can offer.

- 302 The paints used are a red seed (*obonda sari*), red ochre (*obonda opasi*), red clay (*niami*), grey or whitish clay (*onu*), charcoal (*oku*), and a leaf called *sopapa*. The last is crushed and mixed with lime and spittle, and forms a bright greenish yellow. I have discovered no trace of clan or tribal markings, the only approach toward distinctive patterns being found in the one or two devices employed by sects of the Taro cult.¹

¹ 'The Taro Cult', in *Orokaiva Magic*, p. 67.

THE TARO CULT

X-794 remote associations may seem causally effective to a
 787 native. Taimi happened to leave his lime-stick in his
 158 house; his mother, or his mother's spirit, spat on it; subsequently Taimi prodded his friend in the stomach with the stick, by now in some manner galvanized, and his friend was seized with a paroxysm.

X-794 I have already referred to certain individual Taro men
 792 of distinction. The number of those who follow the cult in the Northern Division is not to be computed, but there are among them men of distinction and reputation who may be called leaders and who might be if necessary catalogued. Their pre-eminence is due partly to their own personality (for it is not every native who has the makings of a magician), and partly to mere priority. Thus, if one man communicates the Taro to another, the latter will probably recognize the former as his superior. This respect for superiors may sometimes take a comical turn. To see a Taro man, his face covered with paint and his limbs with streaks of clay, his body stuck about with sprigs of coloured leaves, and his wits bemused by betel-nut—to see such a man offer a grave salute, in the exaggerated style of the Native Constabulary, to his superior, whose attire and demeanour even outdo his own, is almost as diverting to the European as it is impressive to the native. This habit of deference to the initiator results in a sort of hierarchy, very ill-defined, as might be expected, because the cult shows such a tendency to split up into minor sects, but nevertheless containing the seeds of an interesting development.

X-794 The disciple sometimes has to undergo a kind of
 784 probation. Having once acquired the Taro he must, for a considerable period (until, indeed, it is thoroughly established or ingrained into him), observe certain taboos. The chief of these is the taboo against washing. There are instances in which the enthusiastic acolyte forgoes the pleasures of a midday bathe for as long as eight months. When the Taro cult had crept insidiously into one of the mission schools, its presence was first

PROPHETS AND CONVERTS

33

detected—among a class of well-grown young females—by the missionary's nostrils. The reason for this taboo seems to lie in the supposed efficacy of running water, which will not only cleanse away impurity, but also carry off and dissipate the *mana* of the prophet. It is in keeping with this idea that the Taro novice be allowed, if necessary, to wash in *still*, swampy water. The taboos which are incumbent upon the professing Taro man will call for further description. The probationary taboo against washing should normally come to an end only with the permission of the superior who has been responsible for the novice's entry into the cult; but it must not be supposed that this rule is carried out in any strictness.

It sometimes happens that an aspirant grows tired of the restrictions which are imposed upon him; and even a qualified Taro man may voluntarily break through them and *ipso facto* relinquish his status. Thus we find 'resignations', sometimes because of the constant tiresome *jipari*, sometimes because of the taboo upon bathing, sometimes because the temptation of forbidden foods cannot be resisted. One man said he had given over the Taro because he was hungry for eels, *obiti*, which are banned to the faithful. Another, wounded in a village affray and temporarily incapacitated, had obtained a sort of absolution from the man who introduced him to the cult, and by bathing in a stream thus automatically ceased to be a Taro man.

It is entirely in keeping with native custom that payment should be made by the initiate to his superior, though such payment does not seem to be necessary or invariable. At any rate, it is not so much that the master makes a charge, but rather that the disciple makes a gift in return for services rendered. It is said that the improvement in the taro crop will amply justify the gratitude of the new Taro man to his teacher.

A man of Katuna—now a veritable hot-bed of Taro—had visited Buninia in the early days of the cult. Sleeping in the master's house he shook and dreamt simultane-

THE TARO CULT

X 794⁴⁶
784
262 powers of healing. There are many more food taboos. Some of them may well enough be survivals from the *Baigona* cult (which placed a prohibition upon almost all creeping things), as they appear to have no very obvious bearing on Taro. Certain kinds of the taro itself were held to be injurious—only so, indeed, since the institution of the cult, for previously these forbidden varieties were eaten without any untoward result; Mr. Elder says they were given to his mission boys, 'who being unbelievers thrived on them'.

X 794
784
● 515
753 The taboo upon bathing has already been mentioned. It was evidently observed with a certain strictness and, in some cases at least, a breach of the taboo meant more than the mere loss of power. One Taro man of importance gave the following explanation for a lameness in the knee which had crippled him for eight months. Having used his spear too effectively in a village fight he was removed to jail, and there, under a regimen which took no heed of his priestly obligations, compelled to cut his hair and wash the smears of mud and white ochre off his body. The unfortunate prisoner's explanation still leaves one mystified: the dirt, mud, and paint being washed off the remainder of his body, concentrated in his knee and there brought on his lameness.

X 794
516 One important business of the Taro man's, viz. that of curing, will receive a fuller treatment in section 9, and is mentioned here only because it has to be included in a general list of Taro activities. A few additional matters of minor interest, however, may be referred to at this stage. One is the custom of hand-shaking. I am assured that the hand-grip was known as a form of greeting long before the advent of the new cult; but now it has become a rage. When a Taro man comes upon a number of men engaged in conversation and sitting, after their fashion, in a haphazard group on the ground, he will go from one to another and take the hand of each in turn. As a rule the hand-clasp is somewhat limp and unresponsive, though on occasion one may see two

X 794
576
828

GOOD AND BAD MAGIC

213

a considerable time until its toxic properties are purged away, when it becomes a favourite food. I have never heard, however, of the young cycad fruit being used as a poison. The same is the case regarding the bark *Tangiri*, in which the presence of what I take to be Prussic acid is discernible by its smell. The only use of *Tangiri* within my knowledge is that of fumigating a man's head of hair. The bark is heated, and when it is emitting a cloud of pungent smoke is clamped upon the infested head of the patient. [515]

Lastly, there is the *Pekamba*. This closely resembles the plant known in the Northern Division as *Punjaru*, remarkable for the gigantic flower which, when it passes maturity, breaks up in horrible and vile-smelling decomposition. It is not this decomposing substance, however, but the root of the related plant *Pekamba* (possibly also of *Punjaru* itself) which acts as a very strong corrosive poison. This again has been used in suicides, and further it provides one of the conventional means of self-castigation in time of great grief. A mourner on his way to a funeral will pluck up a *Pekamba* by the roots, and as he enters the wailing village will put his teeth into it and gnaw it until some less distracted or perhaps less theatrical mourner snatches it away. Should any be swallowed the result, I am assured, would be fatal. One old man of my acquaintance had chewed the *Pekamba* too freely in the forgetfulness of his grief and was in consequence ill and hardly able to eat for a period which he estimated at 'six weeks'. [762] [152]

There are no doubt other poisons of which I have no knowledge. But with those that have been mentioned it is possible that the plea advanced by the natives themselves regarding *Anisi* is equally applicable, i.e. they are not used because in fatal quantity they would be detected by the suspicious nostrils or palate of the victim. In fine, however, when we consider the countless variety of specifics which are supposed to possess deadly properties and which in known cases prove to be utterly

SOCIAL CONTROL AMONGST THE OROKAIVA

113

child's teeth tickled her in their tentative exploring. All these mothers laughed at the infants, with comments signifying, "He is not content to drink my milk; he wants to eat me, too." 862

When the baby learns to walk, even if he is still unsteady on his feet, he ceases to be *meni orosati* and is known as *meni isapa* until he is about eight or nine years old. He stays at home with his older siblings while his mother goes to the garden, but she does not stay there all day now. She leaves the village quite early in the morning and returns to prepare a midday meal. As soon as the child is able to walk with his mother without impeding her progress, he goes to the garden with her. As he grows older, he plays with the other children in the gardens and may help his mother a little. Children of two or three years eat solid foods, mainly taro, but they still suckle. If they hang around their mother, except to approach the breast, she scolds them and makes them go away. Sometimes, if she is busy or does not want to sit down, she refuses them the breast. They go to their father, who spends much of his time sitting on the ground talking with the other men. The father takes the child between his legs, delouses his head affectionately, and holds him in his arms. It is always to the father that the child, especially the male child, runs for comfort. 855
857

The *meni isapa*, particularly at the age of two or three years, are the butt of jokes from the grown men, who frighten them by making strange noises and lunging threateningly in their direction then laughing loudly as they watch the children cry, register bewilderment and run to their fathers. When their initial terror is overcome, the children learn to laugh at their own fright. This happens continually, until the child learns not to be afraid, imitates the men's frightening noises and grins back at them cheekily. All this is accepted by the women, who make no attempt to shield their children from experiencing such frights. If the men are her kinfolk, or friends of her husband or brother, the mother will join in with their raucous laughter. If they are strangers, she will take no notice of the incident. This frightening of small boys (*meni isapa*) is deliberate. Sometimes little girls are frightened incidentally at the same time, but no one takes much notice of this. Men do not go out of their way to frighten the little girls. [593]
[515]

From about nine years till initiation at fifteen or sixteen, the child is known as *meni dombo*, or "big boy" (female, *meni kakara dombo*). I know very little about the *meni dombo*, either male or female. Married women among the Orokaiva are alarmed by the behaviour of the *meni kakara dombo*, who approach men casually to demand cigarettes and to talk freely about sexual matters in a joking way. This suggests that parents probably exercised more control in former times over the older children. [522]

In Orokaiva childhood there are at least two conflict situations. At teething, the infant learns that he must not bite the mother's breast. Biting is accorded the immediate punishment of physical blows and unfeeling laughter at the child's expense. A three years old boy wanted to suckle and was kept waiting by his mother, who told him that she was busy and that he was getting too old to suckle anyway. He retaliated by biting her breast, but she hit him, scolded him and chased him away, 178
857
155
862
[81]